

Spiritualism

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I. THE SPIRITUALIST RELIGION

No one who will take the trouble to glance at the advertisement columns of any Spiritualist journal can long remain in doubt that for the most part the adherents of the movement regard it as a kind of religion. It is true that the leading organizations in this country are content with such names as 'The Spiritualists' National Union', 'The Marylebone Spiritualist Association', 'The London Spiritualist Mission', 'The International Federation of Spiritualists', etc.; and there is, of course, no religious suggestion in the wording of these titles. They were probably chosen expressly to avoid any semblance of pronouncing upon a question which provokes agitating differences of opinion among their members. On the other hand we also find that there are twenty-two Spiritualist churches in the Greater London area currently (January, 1979) advertising their services in the *Psychic News* each week. There are other places calling themselves temples of light or healing sanctuaries, but 'church' seems the favourite designation. By itself the term 'churches' would seem to be a little ambiguous. Does it stand for the groups of people who meet together, or the buildings which house them? In any case we must not think of stately edifices such as the Christian Scientists have erected in Boston, in New York, and all over London. The Spiritualist churches are for the most part little reunions assembling in some inconspicuous meeting house, often only hired for the purpose. But they have services at which prayers are offered and hymns are sung, while the addresses, delivered under trance or otherwise, most commonly have something of the quality of sermons.

In June, 1966 TV cameras for the first time filmed a Spiritualist service. One can buy a Spiritualist hymn book containing 418 hymns, and its publishers boast that it 'can be used with the music of the Methodist Hymn Tune book.'

There can in any case be no question that the religious bearings of the alleged communications from beyond the veil are a matter of considerable interest to the vast majority of those who identify themselves with the movement.

But the endless divergences of view which have characterized the cult from its earliest days begin precisely here. Many Spiritualists contend that their tenets do not constitute an independent religion, but are consistent with existing forms of Christianity, while others not less vehemently deny this. On April 13th, 1934, there occurred what was described as the 'first occasion on which a representative Spiritualist has been given an opportunity of telling listeners (on the wireless) what Spiritualism is and what it is not.' Mr E. W. Oaten, at that time Editor of *The Two Worlds*, and President of the International Federation of Spiritualists, was the speaker, but his presentment of Spiritualism as a religion in competition with existing Christianity was adversely criticized in more than one quarter by his fellow believers. Mr Oaten had declared that Spiritualism was a religion. 'It is my religion,' he said, 'my only religion.' This attitude, so the

Editor of *Light* protested, was regrettable, 'because many Spiritualists do not agree with Mr Oaten in regarding Spiritualism as a religion, but look upon it rather as a set of scientifically ascertained facts, which provide the preamble for all the great religions and set up standards by which the truth of religious dogma and doctrine may be judged.' [*Light*, May 18th, 1934, p. 304.]

What this comes to fundamentally is that some Spiritualists, perhaps the majority, still retain a lingering belief in traditional Christianity, while others do not. The divergence in opinion upon this point has been the snag upon which for so many years past every effort to organize the cult and to frame some declaration of principles and purposes has come to grief. As the Editor of the *Spiritual Magazine* pointed out as far back as September, 1873, 'hitherto all attempts at national organization, whether in America or England, have met with little or no success, generally indeed leading to a more complete disorganization by bringing out more conspicuously the wide and fundamental differences on important subjects which divide Spiritualists, and which vitally affect their conception of Spiritualism.' [*The Spiritual Magazine*, 1873, p. 385.] These differences have not in any way grown less during the century which has elapsed since this was written. Both in America and England they have tended rather to become more pronounced. A scholar who has paid much attention to the subject in the United States speaks as follows, and nearly all that he says applies with equal force to the situation in Great Britain:

"The Spiritualist organization, regarded in its world-wide aspect, is poorly centralized. There is no ecclesiastical head or heads, no equivalent of a Pope, Archbishop, Bishop, or other dignitaries and officials of the orthodox faiths. Nor is there a leader and prophet, such as Mrs Eddy for Christian Science, or Mme Blavatsky, Miss Katherine Tingley, or Mrs Besant for Theosophy.

"In Spiritualism no one individual, no one group or faction, is all-powerful, in any executive or legislative way. There is no single leader or prophet who is the germinal principal or guide of the movement, nor is there any single body or council to which Spiritualists, whether in this country (i.e. the U.S.A.) or all over the world, may go as a court of last appeal.

"They also lack a written word or testament, a holy book which is universally regarded as the source of authority. There is no Spiritualist equivalent of the Holy Bible, the Talmud, the Koran, or *Science and Health*." *

[* George Lawton, *The Drama of Life after Death; a study of the Spiritualist Religion*, p. 137. This substantial volume of 700 pages, though published in London by Constable (1933), was printed in America and submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, in the faculty of Philosophy, Columbia University.]

In the United States an International General Assembly of Spiritualists (based on Buffalo, N.Y.) has since 1936 attempted to co-ordinate the activities of devotees; it claimed in 1956 (the last year for which official statistics are available) some 164,072 adherents (all in U.S.A.?) in 209 churches with 221 clergy. In addition there is a National Spiritualist Alliance dating from 1913, with but 3,208 adherents (in 1962) and 51 clergy, and also a Nationalist Spiritualist Association of Churches. This last had (in 1962) 5,721 members (in contrast with 41,233 in 1926) while the number of churches (178) suggests that congregations are very small. It is this last body which claims that its members believe that 'Spiritualism is a science, philosophy and religion based upon the demonstrated facts of communication between this world and the next'. Its decline in numbers implies that a more strictly defined belief in Spiritualism as a religion is not so popular as the more vague allegiance to what is little more than a variety of Unitarian belief, with some psychic novelty thrown in. These figures have to be set alongside the totals for the main religions of the United States: twelve million Methodists, three million Episcopalians and forty-nine million Catholics. Spiritualist churches in England claimed (1971) no more than 15,657 members. In U.S.A. the 1975 total for Unitarians, Spiritualists, Ethical churches and other non-Christian groups was 371,799.

Mr J. Arthur Findlay (a Glasgow businessman who was won over to Spiritualism by experiences with a

medium named Sloan) tells in his autobiography how he financed the *Psychic News* from its first appearance in 1931 for many years before it showed a profit. In 1946 it had reached a circulation of 27,600 copies a week, while the older periodicals, *Light* and *Two Worlds*, changed from weekly to monthly publication. In that cautionary tale about two officers who faked spiritualist happenings to win their way to freedom from a Turkish prison in 1917, the author spoke frankly about the appeal of Spiritualism to those who had lost husbands or sons in the war:

"I know well that conversations with the dear dead are the everyday stock-in-trade of the average medium. It makes mediumship so much easier. Besides, for all I know, the medium may be genuine. And far be it from me to decry the efforts of eminent scientists to forge their links with the world beyond by any means they choose. They want to break through the partition. In their efforts they have perhaps every right to circularize the widows and mothers of those whose names adorn the Roll of Honour. To the scientist a widow or a mother is only a unit for the purpose of experiment and percentage. To the professional medium she represents so much bread and butter." [*The Road to En-Dor*, by Lieut. E. H. Jones (1920), p. 43.]

The aftermath of the Second World War was distinguished by no such wave of popularity for Spiritualism as had followed the First. There had intervened much patient research into the possibilities of telepathy between the living, as a merely natural happening which gifted individuals may experience. The conviction of Mrs Duncan, a well-known medium, for fraud in 1944 was widely marked, and though in 1951 the Witchcraft Act of 1735 was repealed (along with the relevant portions of the Vagrancy Act of 1824), it was replaced by the Fraudulent Mediums Act (22 June 1951). This imposed penalties up to £500 fine or two years' imprisonment on those who for gain 'fraudulently purported to act as mediums or to exercise powers of telepathy, clairvoyance or other similar powers.' The promoter of the Bill claimed to be acting for some 50,000 Spiritualists in Britain in putting their house in order. Speaking in the Lords second reading debate (3 May 1951) the Earl of Perth said that Catholics would wish Spiritualists to have the same measure of toleration as other religious bodies. He hoped that the leaders of ecclesiastical Spiritualism would guard against the spread of fraudulent practices; it was in their interest to do so.

A good many people, no doubt, are ready to believe that communication with the other world is possible, but their faith is not so robust as to lead them to make pecuniary sacrifices for the cause. The crowds which flocked to hear Mrs Meurig Morris or Mrs Estelle Roberts were no indication of any strength of conviction. In a great city like London, with a population of eight millions, a famous and well-advertised trance-speaker or clairvoyant will be sure to attract packed audiences. But so also does any other celebrity, and almost any religious demonstration. Witness the vogue of healers like Coue or Harry Edwards, or of evangelists like Billy Graham or Sun Myung Moon. A crowded attendance in London tells us practically nothing regarding the real forces involved. As to the ordinary meetings of the Spiritualist 'churches', I cannot discover that any great keenness is manifested. In America, Mr Lawton, who speaks without prejudice and from personal observation, notes that most services are attended by not more than twenty to twenty-five persons, and he adds, 'the audience consists nearly entirely of women. Women predominate at most religious services, but at Spiritualist services the preponderance is overwhelming; there will be found perhaps five and often more women to every man.' [Lawton, p. 203] We may also learn from him that 'Spiritualism has more "transients", at least at "Message Services", than almost any other faith. For any given Spiritualist to attend the services of a particular church, week after week and year after year, as is the custom in other faiths, would be an unheard-of phenomenon.' [Lawton, p. 204]

That there are probably many more people nowadays interested in psychical phenomena, and prepared to credit the reality of such manifestations, than was the case in the Victorian era, is largely due to a loss of faith in Christian revelation. It is at best a groping in the direction of psychical research, and psychical research is not Spiritualism, though the two are often confused in the popular mind. Moreover, where the Spiritualistic attitude properly so called is predominant, the tendency is not towards uniformity of teaching, but altogether in the contrary sense. There is not in truth one Spiritualist religion, but rather fifty, or we might equally well say, five hundred religions, each depending upon the teaching of the 'control' who purports to communicate through his own special medium. Upon the fact of survival, these controls

are agreed, and also necessarily upon the possibility of intercourse between those who have passed on and men who still live upon earth, but with regard to almost every other matter there is an endless divergence of view.

In certain organizations of the cult, notably in the Spiritualists' National Union, much is made of what are called the Seven Principles of Spiritualism. To the belief in survival after death, which, of course, is held in common with every Christian sect, these Principles add little which is not found in the Gospels. The Principles do however take something away from Christianity. The *Lyceum Manual* denies Redemption through Christ, directing the faithful to call Jesus brother, but not Redeemer. The Fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, the duty of doing to others as we should wish others to do unto us, assurance of a future life, the circumstances of which are conditioned by man's conduct for good or evil during his earthly existence - these are the commonplaces of every Christian creed. When Mr J. Arthur Findlay, and other anti-Church Spiritualists of the same aggressive type, declare that these teachings are to be accepted because 'they are given from the Etheric world to all who make contact with it,' and because 'they are drawn from the information which comes to us from those who have passed on to the larger life,' * we can only marvel at the extravagance of such a pose.

[* See Findlay, *The Rock of Truth*, p. 185, and compare the comments of Mrs St Clair Stobart in *Light*, October 6th, 1933, p. 630. The anti-Catholic tone of some Spiritualist writing is very marked. In 1946 an editor of the *Psychic News* replied to Fr H. V. O'Neill's book on Spiritualism (*Spiritualism* 1944) with a work of almost the same length entitled *Keep the Rome fires burning*, full of old-fashioned Protestant controversy which would have endeared its author to the 'Ultras' of Belfast or Portadown. Mr Findlay in his autobiography confesses that as a child he used to pray that the Roman Catholics might not rise from their beds. Inconsistently, he boasted elsewhere in the same work that in 1934, when he lectured on Spiritualism in Rome, a Cardinal (unnamed) told him that séances were held at the Vatican, but that Pope Pius XI was a bad sitter and that much better results were obtained when he was not present. He may not have expected to find humour in a Cardinal.]

We can only marvel at the extravagance of such a pose. As if Spiritualism alone had realized the brotherhood of men and the need of charity! What has any Spiritualist ever done for his fellows to compare with the examples set by St Vincent de Paul, St Peter Claver, St John of God, and a thousand others, centuries before 'contact with the Etheric' was dreamed of. Two only of these seven Principles affirm anything which can be regarded as a religious novelty. The one assumes that intercourse with the world of spirits is a normal source of guidance, the other declares that 'the path of progress is never closed,' that is to say that the accident of death is no bar to further advance. These teachings we are asked to accept upon the word of such purporting communicators as 'Red Cloud', 'White Feather', 'Imperator', 'Nona', 'Johannes', 'Moonstone', and a crowd of others, for whose existence in this world or the next not a shadow of evidence is forthcoming beyond the fact that these are the fantastic names which they have chosen to give themselves.

It is particularly noteworthy that in the Seven Principles no reference is made to the question of Reincarnation. As almost everyone knows, and as the periodicals of the cult for the past century continually bear witness, this is a matter upon which Spiritualists are everywhere divided and are apt to hold violent opinions. At the same time it is easy to see that no piece of knowledge can be more fundamentally important in the scheme of future existence which they set before us. What is the use of affirming survival and the identity of the individual after death if the continuity of memory is liable to be completely broken? Supposing that the spirit which has been released from its fleshy integuments is destined in course of time to return to earth again, and is to be united to a new body, losing all recollection of a previous existence, what becomes of the glowing pictures of the peaceful 'summerland' which play so large a part in the Spiritualist propaganda? The Seven Principles affirm that 'the path of progress is never closed,' but that must be a strange progress which brings man back to the helplessness of infancy, without a vestige of the knowledge and experience he had gained when he previously lived on earth. Nevertheless nearly all the Spiritualists of France and Southern Europe are committed to the *religion spirite* which was founded by Allan Kardec, and which is completely identified with the teaching of Reincarnation. * [* See

further the CTS pamphlet *Reincarnation* (1978) by the present writer, Joseph Crehan, (Do 498).]

At the Fifth International Congress of Spiritualists, held at Barcelona in 1934, we are told by Mr Maurice Barbanell, the editor of *Psychic News*, that 'A vigorous attempt was made by delegates from the Latin countries to commit the Congress to this belief (Reincarnation). This caused violent discussions, which lasted, at one evening session, until one o'clock in the morning! Even when the delegates left the hall, private talks continued until 2.30 in the morning.' *

[* Quaintly enough the failure of the Congress is laid by Mr Barbanell at the door of the Spanish Inquisition, which was finally suppressed in 1820. 'There appear to be few, if any, mediums in Spain,' he says. 'The Spanish Inquisition stamped out mediumship. They called it witchcraft. They tortured, burnt, and had the "witches" put to death.' Mr Barbanell does not seem to know that there were more witches put to death in England during the single reign of Elizabeth than suffered in Spain during the three centuries the Spanish Inquisition lasted.]

In England and in America this belief in Reincarnation at first found little favour; D. D. Home in particular attacked it strenuously; but later it was put forward and taken for granted in dozens of books embodying spirit messages and automatic scripts. *

[* See, for example, *Claude's Book*, by Mrs Kelway Bamber, or *The Witness*, by Jessie Platts. In this last we may find 'Tiny' addressing his mother from beyond the veil: 'It is awfully funny to think I haven't been an Englishman always, but I don't mind that. I wonder if you have ever been a man . . . Well, mother, you needn't feel so shocked. It does happen; and I don't mind knowing that I was once a woman,' p. 49. Curiously enough, *The Witness* is a book highly commended in Conan Doyle's *Pheneas Speaks*, p. 83. A correspondent in *Psychic News* for Oct. 26th, 1946, deplores the 'increasing tendency to mix Spiritualism with the highly speculative theories of Theosophy.']

Dr Fielding Ould, the President of the London Spiritualist Alliance, argued in favour of Reincarnation in a public discussion, and 'Power', the control of Mrs Meurig Morris, is said to have pronounced in the same sense. On the other hand, in America the National Spiritualist Association, meeting at Detroit in October, 1930, passed a resolution to the effect that 'acceptance of the doctrine of Reincarnation as a principle of Spiritualism subverts the chief premise of our teaching, which is that of continuity of life, recognition of departed friends, and reunion.' To ordinary common sense this conclusion seems incontrovertible, but for all that Reincarnation theories are continually being advocated in the English Spiritualist journals, even in those which formerly were firm in their opposition to such teaching. * [* The medium Ena Twigg in her *Autobiography* (1973) professes belief in Reincarnation, against the belief of many.]

The one thing which may be asserted with absolute confidence regarding the Spiritualist religion is that the powers which claim to instruct and to guide from the other side differ as much, or even more, in their views than do religious teachers here on earth. There is chaos and not order in the supposed etheric world. There is ignorance, sometimes openly confessed, even upon so vital a point as the question whether men who are born upon this planet have one human existence or many. *

[* For example, Mr F. W. FitzSimons, F.Z.S. in his book, *Opening the Psychic Door* (1933), claims to be in contact with a band of controls of exceptional wisdom and of an integrity beyond suspicion. The most prominent of these, 'Dr Morgan', questioned regarding Reincarnation, replies, 'No one over here with whom I have talked appears to know whether it is true or not' (p. 119, and cf. pp. 123 and 145-6).]

II. THE BEGINNINGS OF THE MOVEMENT

1) For those who approach the question of Spiritualism from the standpoint of the late Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and other enthusiastic believers in the New Revelation, it must be a little difficult to explain why

any effective intervention of the spirit world in human affairs should have been so long delayed. We are told that many of these intelligences who passed on thousands of years ago are supremely wise, that it is their main concern to guide and uplift mankind, and that only through this channel can the people be rescued from the dogmatic fictions of the Churches on the one hand and the blank hopelessness of materialism on the other. Yet it was not until 1848 that intercourse with the realm of shades was opened up. For all practical purposes before that time the oracles were dumb. The delay was not due to the lack of suitable communicators. 'Pheneas', the special control of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's family, claims to have died 'thousands of years ago' and to have lived at Ur before the time of Abraham. 'Imperator', the dominant partner of the Stainton Moses band, declared himself to be identical with the prophet Malachi (c. 460 B.C.). We have then to suppose that these and a crowd of other beneficent spirits were in effect impotent to convey any message to mankind until two uneducated little girls in the hamlet of Hydesville, U.S.A., showed them the way to a solution by imitating the strange knockings which were heard in the haunted house their parents occupied. By these knockings a means of communication was first established just over a hundred years ago.

2) No one can dispute the fact that modern Spiritualism only dates from the year 1848. Both in America and in England the anniversary from time to time has been commemorated with great solemnity. The centenary of the event was celebrated in London on 31st March, 1948, but so quietly that it failed to be noticed. There was no report in *The Times* of its happening; people were more preoccupied with rationing and the Berlin airlift. In America the frame-house in which the Fox family lived has been taken down and built up elsewhere. It now bears the inscription: 'Spiritualism originated in this house, March 31st, 1848.'

3) There is no satisfactory evidence to prove that the two child mediums, Maggie and Katie Fox, through whom the intercourse with the spirit world by means of rappings first took its rise, were either vicious or fraudulent at the beginning of their career. *

[* In an essay of this size, it is impossible to discuss the evidence with the fullness which is necessary to provide any convincing demonstration of the reality of Spiritualistic phenomena. I must refer the reader to chapters viii and ix of *The Church and Spiritualism* by H. Thurston, S.J. (The Bruce Co., Milwaukee), pp. 143-223. The President and Founder of the Magicians Club, Mr Will Goldston, a man who has exposed many fraudulent mediums, is nevertheless a convinced believer in the genuineness of certain remarkable manifestations of mediumistic powers. See his book, *Secrets of Famous Illusionists* (1933), pp. 115-132.]

4) But while, as I hold, we may admit that the Fox sisters were genuine mediums and that very remarkable and inexplicable phenomena were wont to occur in their presence, there can be no possible question that these two wonder-workers, who for thirty years and more were acclaimed as the founders of Spiritualism, both came to a very sad end. It is on record that the first message of guidance which they received from the spirits in 1848 was to the following effect:

Dear Friends,

You must proclaim these truths to the world. This is the dawning of a new era; and you must not try to conceal it any longer. When you do your duty, God will protect you and good spirits will watch over you.

* [* 'Leah Underhill (nee Fox), *The Missing Link* (New York, 1885), pp. 48-49. Mrs Underhill was an elder sister of Maggie and Katie Fox, and herself a medium.]

5) Maggie and Katie Fox did not fail to devote their energies to the propagation of Spiritualism, but the promise of protection was illusory, at any rate it led to no result. On October 21st, 1888, the two sisters, who some time previously had contracted habits of intemperance, were persuaded - it may be were bribed, though I know no direct evidence of this - to attend an anti-Spiritualist meeting in one of the large halls in New York. There Maggie, in the presence of her sister, read aloud a short statement, in the course of which she declared: 'I am here tonight as one of the founders of Spiritualism to denounce it as absolute falsehood ... the most wicked blasphemy known to the world.' This was followed by what purported to be a demonstration that the medium by cracking her toe- or ankle-joints was able to produce raps which

could be heard all over the room. * [* A more detailed account of this momentous incident can be found in (Thurston) *The Church and Spiritualism*, pp. 19-44; see also R. B. Davenport, *The Deathblow to Spiritualism*, New York, 1888.]

6) That the scene occurred as described may be learnt from all the contemporary newspapers of New York, and is perforce admitted by the most zealous advocates of the cult. * [* See, for example, Conan Doyle in *Psychic Science*, October, 1922, pp. 212-237.]

7) They urge, however, that a year later Maggie, in the presence of witnesses, formally retracted all that she had said. This also is indisputable, but such contradictory declarations are equally worthless as evidence. The sisters at that time were so far the victims of the craving for drink that all sense of moral responsibility was lost. Within a few years both were dead. When Maggie, the last survivor, was nearing her end, an American newspaper described her as 'an object of charity, a mental and physical wreck, whose appetite is only for intoxicating liquors;' and added: 'the lips that utter little else now than profanity once promulgated the doctrine of a new religion which still numbers its tens of thousands of enthusiastic believers.' * [* *The Washington Daily Star*, March 7th, 1893, quoted in *The Medium and Daybreak*, a London Spiritualist newspaper, April 7th, 1893.]

8) A few weeks later we find the editor of a leading English Spiritualist journal (Mr James Burns) improving the occasion in such terms as these:

"Here we have a wonderful two-fold spiritual spectacle; we have a woman giving spiritual manifestations to others, while within herself she is spiritually lost and misdirected. All moral sense and control of mind and desire were gone ... But when the medium makes a trade of it and puffs the thing up as a commodity for sale, then farewell to all that might elevate or instruct in the subject ... Under such circumstances, and with drunkenness, sensuality, and moral abasement of all kinds added, is it any wonder that this kind of thing has covered the cause with scandals and left a heap of festering corpses along the course of these forty-five years?" [*The Medium and Daybreak*, April 28th, 1893, p. 258.]

9) When a responsible representative of the movement used such language, can we fail to ask ourselves whether that contact with the spirit world which is alleged to have come about through the agency of the two Fox children has been for good or rather for evil?

10) It is no part of the contention of this essay that the phenomena commonly associated with Spiritualism must, when genuine, be necessarily of diabolic origin. The problem presented by these manifestations is extremely complicated, and in my judgement investigation will have to be carried on for many years - it may be for centuries - before it will be possible to pronounce confidently upon the nature of the strange occurrences of which we have incontrovertible evidence. But the tragic history of the Fox sisters must surely cast the gravest suspicion upon the wisdom, the beneficent purpose, and the promises of those supposed intelligences, whatever they may be, which purport to communicate from the other side. Already in 1852 the Rev. Adin Ballou, a man of very sober judgement, was assured, as he believed, by his dead son that by Spiritualism the world was about to be transformed into a new Eden. 'Father', the boy urged, 'be patient, watch and wait. Another century cannot commence before this great change; will be wrought.' * [* Ballou, *Spirit Manifestations* (Boston, 1852), pp. 228, 230, 236-7. This was the earliest reasoned treatise on Spiritualism.]

11) No one, again, can be blind to the impression conveyed by Sir Oliver Lodge's book, *Raymond*, that a stupendous effect is to be produced in the world by Spiritualism - and that very soon. Thus, to take one instance, on March 3rd, 1916, Raymond, communicating at a Mrs Leonard séance, told his father: 'Mr Myers (i.e. the famous F. W. H. Myers, the psychic researcher who died in 1901) says that in ten years from now the world will be a different place. He says that about fifty per cent of the civilized portion of the globe will be either Spiritualists or coming into it.' * [* Lodge, *Raymond*, 6th Edition, p. 249, cf. pp. 133-4, 234-5, etc., all glowing with prophecies of the future.]

12) The ten years spoken of are now long past, but the change predicted has not taken place. The 'New Revelation' has not justified itself except as a new revelation of the readiness with which men are deceived and are carried about by every wind of doctrine. How can we expect guidance or the regeneration of mankind from powers that have shown themselves both blind to foresee the future, and impotent to protect their own chosen instruments, even those who are honoured as the founders of the new cult, from the most ignoble ruin?

III. THE DANGERS OF SPIRITUALISM

The Catholic Church has always condemned any attempt to hold intercourse of set purpose with the spirits of the dead. The Old Testament speaks in terms which cannot be mistaken (see, for example, Deut 18: 10-12), and the very striking incident in the Acts of the Apostles (ch. 16), concerning the 'girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by sooth-saying,' teaches us that the attitude of strict moralists had not changed since the coming of our Lord. Though the girl had spoken no falsehood of Paul and Silas, but rather had seemed to further their work by proclaiming that 'these men are the servants of the most high God,' St Paul took it amiss and commanded the spirit to go out of her. *

[* Those who, like Conan Doyle and J. Arthur Findlay, believe that our Lord and his disciples were not only mediums but propagandists of Spiritualism, must find this attitude of St Paul, as early as 52 A.D., a little difficult to explain! Yet Doyle says 'the early Christian Church was saturated with Spiritualism, and they seem to have paid no attention to the Old Testament prohibitions' (*The New Revelation*, p. 80). Doyle and others appeal to the 'speaking with tongues' of 1 Cor 14, but St Paul makes it clear that the phenomenon, whatever it was, had to be kept under control: 'If there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silence in church and speak to himself and to God.']

The language used in Acts 16 seems to imply that the control which spoke through the lips of this divineress or medium was an evil spirit. Whether these biblical precedents were responsible or not, it is certain that most Christian teachers throughout the intervening centuries have been disposed to treat all occult powers which savoured of necromancy as diabolic in their origin. It is only of recent years, since hypnotism and its strange manifestations have become familiar, that theologians have realized that such faculties as telepathy and clairvoyance may possibly be natural gifts, abnormal and hitherto unrecognized because until lately no serious attention was ever paid to them.

On the other hand, it must in fairness be admitted that both earlier and recent accounts of what purport to be hauntings or obsessions originating in the spirit world provide plenty of excuse for believing that the agencies concerned are often malicious, deceptive, and altogether evil. Even if we hesitate to accept the descriptions penned early in the last (19th) century by the Catholic statesman Gorres, or the Lutheran physician Justin Kerner, * [* See J. J. Gorres, *Die christliche Mystik*, 1842, vols. iii and iv, and J. Kerner, *Die Seherin von Prevorst*, 4th edition, 1846.] such modern psychic researchers as Mrs Travers Smith (Hester Dowden) and Mr Hereward Carrington make it clear that unpleasant and even horrible experiences are apt to be encountered not only by the rash and heedless, but also by practised investigators. ** [** There is no space here for details in any fullness, but some illustrations have been quoted in (Thurston) *The Church and Spiritualism*, pp. 86-106, 124-130; and many similar cases might be added.]

To take one instance, Mrs Osborne Leonard, who figures so prominently in *Raymond*, bears the highest reputation as a medium, both for her personal character and for the reliability of her spirit messages. But she has made no secret of an alarming episode which occurred on one occasion when she took part with two friends in an attempt to obtain materialization at an impromptu seance. In a room which was not perfectly dark she saw an arm covered with hair stretched out towards the throat of her companion, Nelly. Mrs Leonard was trying to frame a word of warning in such terms as not to startle her, when the girl 'jumped up with a piercing shriek, knocked over her chair and rushed blindly for the door, which she

shook violently, forgetting in her terror that it was locked.' She had felt the grasp upon her throat which a rent in the blind had enabled the friend beside her to discern visually. * [* Gladys Osborne Leonard, *My Life in Two Worlds*, with a Foreword by Sir Oliver Lodge (1931), p. 35.]

Even if we explain the incident as no more than a case of overwrought nerves, the possibility of such experiences goes far to illustrate the reasonableness of the biblical veto on dabbling in the occult.

But though many Catholics incline to the belief that all the genuine phenomena of Spiritualism are the work of demons, it cannot be maintained that this is a part of the Church's official teaching. The distinguished Dominican Pere Mainage pointed out that the attitude of ecclesiastical authority in these matters may be summed up in three directive principles. [* Pere Th. Mainage, *La Religion Spirite* (1921), p. 176.]

1. The Church has not pronounced upon the essential nature of Spiritualistic phenomena.
2. The Church forbids the general body of the faithful to take any part in Spiritualistic practices.
3. In the manifestations which occur the Church suspects that diabolic agencies may *per accidens* intervene.

Although the decree of the Holy Office in 1898 explicitly forbade the practice of automatic writing in which the psychic allows his hand to be guided to take down messages the content of which is independent of his volition; * and although a similar decree in 1917 condemned any participation in Spiritualistic seances, even though such participation was limited to mere presence as an onlooker, still it would be too much to say that the Church had set her face against all such investigations of phenomena as are commonly included under the term psychic research. [* This prohibition must also be held to ban the use of planchette, the ouija board, and any other similar apparatus.]

To genuine students who are well grounded in theological principles and sufficiently versed in psychology to deal with these manifestations in a scientific spirit, permission may be accorded to experiment with a medium and attend seances. * [* To take only one instance among many that might be appealed to, Fr Alois Gatterer S.J., Professor in the University of Innsbruck, took part in seances with Rudi Schneider and Frau M. Silbert before publishing, in 1927, his book, *Der Wissenschaftliche Okkultismus*. In this, it may be noted, he commits himself to a defence of the reality of the physical phenomena he witnessed.]

The attitude of Catholic authority in the matter is based upon the matured conviction that for the ill-instructed, the idly curious, and the emotional, who are for the most part the very people upon whom the occult exercises the strongest attraction, any contact with the intelligences which purport to communicate from the other world can only be disquieting, and morally, if not physically, dangerous.

Even Spiritualists of the more sober type readily admit the need of great caution on the part of the inexperienced. Mr W. Stainton Moses, at first a beneficed clergyman of the Church of England, and afterwards a member of the teaching staff of University College, London, wrote several works which have more than once been reprinted by the London Spiritualist Alliance as classical handbooks for the guidance of believers. He was the first Editor of *Light*, and was a powerful medium for physical phenomena as well as an automatist. But Stainton Moses was haunted by the dread of personation on the part of the spirits who purported to communicate. He seems never to have been entirely satisfied that he could trust even the chosen 'Imperator' band of controls. [See, for example, Trethewy, *The Controls of Stainton Moses*, pp. 73-74, 189-191, and passim.]

Over and over again he reminds his readers that 'the foes of God and man, enemies of goodness, ministers of evil,' are striving to get into contact with those who are living on earth. He does not call these evil beings devils, because in his view they are the souls of men once on earth that have been 'low in taste and impure in habit,' souls which are 'not changed save in the accident of being freed from the body,' but

which have 'banded themselves together under the leadership of intelligence still more evil.' He urges that, 'unfortunately for us, the spirits which are least progressive, least developed, least spiritual, and most material and earthly, hover round the confines' and are most eager to seek communication. [See Stainton Moses, *Spirit Teachings*, pp. 13, 230, 243, etc., *Spirit Identity*, pp. 16, 21, etc.]

Such language from a recognized adept of high authority in the cult goes far to justify the attitude of the Holy See and the Catholic clergy. And there is much to confirm it in what we find written fifty years later by ardent Spiritualists of our own day. Let us take, almost at random, a passage from the book of F. W. FitzSimons (1933). In this 'a very advanced spirit' with 'a beautiful aura,' controlling the medium, delivers himself thus:

"The manner in which most seances are conducted is appalling. Every opportunity seems to be given to tricky, mischievous, and ignorant spirit people to manifest; it is therefore no matter for wonder that Spiritualism is so mixed up with fraud, vulgarity, contradiction and humbug."

The same control, when asked a little further on whether fictitious names are given by the spirits who purport to manifest, answers:

"Yes, in badly conducted circles where the sitters are uneducated, small-minded, and credulous; the common herd living on the astral plane pander to the vanity of the sitters, by giving high-sounding names, claiming to be those who were well-known and prominent when on earth. These earthbound and lower spirit people flatter and fool the sitters in every manner of way." *

[* FitzSimons, *Opening the Psychic Door* (1933), pp. 189 and 191. See also T. Purchas, *The Spiritual Adventures of a Business Man*, 1929. Mr Purchas is an earnest Spiritualist, but he admits (p. 196) that 'the bad and frivolous spirits, who are liable to be in the majority if the circle is not careful, are even more actively keen than the good to get into communication with the earth.']

It seems obvious that these very frank admissions, which might be multiplied indefinitely, demand, even on Spiritualist principles, an attitude of extreme caution. *

[* Mr Walter Earrey in his monthly *London Spiritualist* has conducted a polemic against the Spiritualist National Union to clean up Spiritualism. In 1978 he procured a benefactor who offered £10,000 to any medium who would produce a materialization under test conditions. Earrey complained: 'Anybody can set up shop anywhere, say he or she is a medium, get people coming along to them and charge them for nothing more than a chit-chat.']

No doubt such writers are always confident that in their own well-conducted circles no misgiving need be felt as to the trustworthiness of the messages received, but seeing that such messages are full of mutual contradictions - the question of Reincarnation, already touched upon, supplies a conspicuous example - an independent test of reliability is needed, and no such test is forthcoming. The State finds it desirable in this country to protect weak human nature against its own depraved propensities by strictly controlling the sale of dangerous drugs such as opium, morphine, and cocaine, by prohibiting the publication of obscene literature, by restricting the hours at which intoxicating liquor may be sold, and in many other ways. Spiritualists can hardly be surprised that the Catholic Church, having good reason to believe that the evocation of the spirits of the dead throughout the ages has produced nothing but evil, refuses resolutely to countenance any attempt at communication with the other world.

Miss Geraldine Cummins in her autobiography (*Unseen Adventures*, 1951, p. 140) claimed to have the blessing of Pius XII for her Spiritualism, while admitting that this had not been given by the Pope in letter or personal audience; apparently she thought that the Pope would be intellectually dishonest if he refused his blessing to those who were trying to follow the example of Christ (who raised up Moses and Elias for the benefit of three Apostles). The guidance of Miss Cummins's automatic writing was much sought by the Canadian prime minister, Mackenzie King. *

[* His *Diary*, now accessible, shows the depth of his credulity. He even saw shapes in the lather while he shaved. "During shaving, I looked at the lather and saw an extraordinary likeness to two dogs." Later he saw "the most perfect head of my mother, again with two dogs." Polonius could not have done better.]

Miss Cummins in an appendix to her book mentions some of the sessions at the Dorchester Hotel in Park Lane, but does not give the name of her sitter. Since the Canadian's death political historians in Canada have claimed that, while he began with personal matters about his own family, Mackenzie King later consulted automatic writings about public policy, e.g. in trying to keep Canada out of the Korea War Commission. Professor Raynor Johnson states (*The Light and the Gate*, p. 141) that a dead friend, Ambrose Pratt, writing to him through Miss Cummins, declared that her 'control' (named Astor) 'is both a secondary personality of Miss Cummins and an individual who once lived on earth.' It is plain from this that the provenance of messages thus received must be most uncertain. Miss Cummins is a person of the utmost integrity, but one cannot help asking if she is used by powers beyond her ken. In the summer of 1939 her 'controls' were telling her that there would be no war in Europe (see H. Thurston, 'Spiritualists and the War', in *The Month*, Oct. 1939). Most Spiritualists claimed guidance in the same sense, and *Psychic News* had to say in September 1939 that they were now facing the blackest week of their lives, though Ena Twigg claims in her autobiography that *her* guides all said there would be a European war.

It being admitted that the lowest types of spirits are the most eager to make contact with the earth, and that the idle people who are particularly curious about the occult are also the most credulous and uncritical, the Church is thoroughly justified in forbidding her own subjects to put themselves needlessly in harm's way. Her sweeping prohibition may entail some hardship upon genuine students, but the good of the greater number of the faithful has the first title to her consideration. She does not act with precipitation. Spiritualism had existed for half a century, and full proof had been given of its harmful results, before the first explicit decree condemning automatic writing was published by the Holy See in 1898.

What is more, no student of the Spiritualistic movement can fail to observe that there has been for many years a steady trend in a direction hostile to Christianity and contemptuous of every form of religious dogma. This was perceptible even in the days of Judge Edmonds and Robert Dale Owen, at a time when no overt disparagement of the Bible or the Creeds was tolerated by public opinion. But the antagonism to revelation and the Churches has been greatly intensified during recent years. Mr J. Arthur Findlay's book, *The Rock of Truth* (1933), as the pages of *Light* and other journals bear witness, seriously shocked a considerable section of his fellow believers. This writer (Findlay) is an avowed disciple of the late J. M. Robertson, author of *Pagan Christs* and other similar works, and he treats all such doctrines as the Trinity, the Fall of Man, the Atonement, everlasting punishment etc., as patent absurdities which can only be a subject for ridicule. *

[* Mr Findlay's house, Stansted Hall, became in 1966 a college for Spiritualists. The anti-Christian tone of the *Psychic News* is still maintained. Thus its editor notes (13 Jan. 1979) that while interest in Spiritualism continues to increase, the Nonconformist churches decline.]

On the other hand, Mr Findlay was an influential member of a number of Spiritualistic organizations, and he was so firm a believer in the spirit messages that in this same book he assured his readers that our earth is encircled by just seven spheres or etheric worlds, in which the spirits dwell.

Much of the violent abuse of the teaching of the Churches purports to have been communicated by exalted spirits in the etheric world. It was, for example, the Doyle control, Pheneas, who railed against 'theological egotism and power and pride,' and who proclaimed that 'Christ's guiding hand to happiness has been twisted by priestcraft till it pointed to Hell. The Church which prates of him thus is his worst enemy.'

* [* Doyle, *Pheneas Speaks*, pp. 153-154.]

If these attacks were based upon a discussion of the historical evidence the mischief would be less serious,

but they purport to be the utterances of supremely wise beings in the world beyond who, having long been emancipated from the conventions and superstitions of earth life, speak with a serenity and breadth of view unattainable by any living teacher. Such communications are apt to be taken at their own valuation, because they do at times exhibit a strange supernormal knowledge of trivial facts which can be verified. On the other hand, there is nearly always a considerable amount of incorrect information associated with the true, though these aberrations are forgotten in the wonder that something unknown has been revealed seemingly from the skies. As Bacon says, 'Men mark when they hit, but never mark when they miss.' The Church has every reason to protect her subjects from pseudo-revelations of this kind, which offer no guarantee of truth and which, for the most part, openly attack the deposit of faith of which she is the appointed custodian.

It should also be noted that many intelligent people who are quite satisfied of the reality of mediumistic faculty and who, on the other hand, are not influenced by any religious scruples, are by no means disposed to encourage communications with the spirit world. Horace Greeley, and Lloyd Garrison, the Editor of *The Liberator*, both of whom in early days had much to do with the Fox sisters, were of this class.

The late Lord Dunraven, who, as Lord Adare, had had unrivalled opportunities of studying the subject, living as he did for a year or more in almost daily companionship with the great medium D. D. Home, gave up the pursuit because he found it led him nowhere. He was not satisfied as to the identity of those who purported to communicate from the other side and, moreover, he adds: 'I observed that some devotees were inclined to dangerous extremes and became so much possessed by the idea of spiritual guidance in the everyday affairs of life as to undermine their self-dependence and to weaken their will power.' [Dunraven, *Past-times and Pastimes* (1922), i, p. 11.]

Sir H. Rider Haggard, the novelist, after relating his personal experience with a medium for physical phenomena, which he could only attribute to some unknown force, concludes with the words: 'Whatever may be the true explanation, on one point I am quite sure, namely, that the whole business is mischievous and to be discouraged. Bearing in mind its effect upon my own nerves, never would I allow any young person over whom I had control to attend a seance.' [Sir H. Rider Haggard, *The Days of My Life* (1926), i, pp. 39-40.]

Haggard was not a recluse or a crank. A considerable part of his life was spent travelling about in South Africa and in many other parts of the world.

All these, and others who cannot here be quoted, speak from personal experience; but one testimony deserves to be cited more at length, because it comes from a psychic who met with remarkable successes in her mediumship and who, for reasons that may easily be conjectured by those who know something of her history, continued, after twenty years of automatism, to exercise her gift. In her book, *Voices from the Void*, Mrs Travers Smith (Hester Dowden, the daughter of Professor Dowden and the niece of the Scottish Episcopalian Bishop Dowden of Edinburgh) refers many times to the disappointments and unpleasant experiences encountered by those who invite communications from the spirit world. One passage must suffice here. She writes:

"If I may venture to advise persons who long to speak once more with those whom they have loved who have vanished in darkness, I should say it is wise and sane not to make the attempt. The chances against genuine communication are ten to one; the disappointments and doubts connected with the experiment are great. Personally, I would not make any attempt to speak to the beloved dead through automatic writings or the ouija board. The evidence they offer of their identity is too ephemeral and unsatisfactory; and as I would not undertake these experiments for myself, I would not willingly help others to risk them. I fear the observations I have just made may be very distasteful to many who approach the subject from the spiritualist point of view. I cannot offer these people any apology for my attitude." [*Voices from the Void*, p. 138.]

The proof of Mrs Travers Smith's psychic power does not rest upon her own testimony. Sir William Barrett investigated more than one remarkable case with which she was connected. [See, for example, 'the tie pin' case in Barrett, *On the Threshold of the Unseen*; and also the incidents following the death of Sir Hugh Lane.]

But in spite of her successes, we find her writing in another collection of essays: 'Psychic investigation is for the few, not for the masses. The unlettered public should be discouraged from pursuing this subject, more especially when excitement and emotion, religious or otherwise, is involved.' And again she says: 'In my opinion most of the cases (of communication) put forward in proof of human survival are entirely unconvincing to any reasonable person, and further most unsatisfying.' [In Huntly Carter, *Spiritualism, its present-day Meaning* (1920), p. 172.]

If Mrs Travers Smith had been a Catholic, which is not the case, and had written in defence of the papal decrees, she could hardly have spoken more appositely.

IV. THE FRAUDULENT SIDE OF SPIRITUALISM

To discuss this aspect of the subject at any length would serve no good purpose, but it certainly cannot be passed over in silence. When Mr James Burns, in 1893, wrote (as quoted above, Section II, paragraph 8) that the moral depravity of mediums had 'covered the cause with scandals and left a heap of festering corpses along the course of these forty-five years.' he was not using stronger language than that employed by Dr Sexton, Mr Andrew Leighton, the medium Home, Mr S. Carter Hall, and many other representative Spiritualists. [For fuller details, see H. Thurston, S.J., *Modern Spiritualism* (Sheed and Ward), 1928, pp. 30-34.]

With the exception of Home, there is hardly a prominent medium for psychical manifestations against whom a good case has not been made out that he or she, at least on certain occasions, had recourse to unscrupulous trickery. There is no room for doubt that the famous Eusapia Palladino in many instances faked her phenomena. 'Dr' Monck, Slade, Eglington, the Holmeses, and a score of others were caught red-handed.

More recently we have had the remarkable case of Mrs Duncan, who unquestionably enjoyed a great reputation in many Spiritualistic circles. This last example is interesting both from the completeness of the exposure and the nature of the fraud itself. Mrs Duncan at these seances used to appear, in a relatively good light, covered to her feet with what seemed to be a flowing sheet of white material. The onlookers saw it, as they thought, extruded from the mouth or other facial orifices. This was supposed to be ectoplasm, and it sometimes showed a little face (a picture) embedded in its texture. Investigation however proved beyond doubt that this enveloping sheet was nothing but a roll of very thin cheese-cloth or butter-muslin, which had been swallowed by the medium and regurgitated. *

[* See Mr Harry Price's full demonstration in *Bulletin of the National Laboratory of Psychic Research* (1931) and a summary in *The Month*, December 1931, pp. 529-534. Mrs Duncan was convicted of fraud in Edinburgh in 1933, and in 1944 convicted at the Old Bailey of 'common fraud' and 'plain dishonesty' and sentenced to nine months' imprisonment. Yet her certificate was renewed by the Spiritualists' National Union. See *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, vol. xlviii (1946), pp. 32-64.]

So again the medium Valiantine, whose supernatural exploits have been glorified beyond measure by Mr H. Dennis Bradley in his widely-read books *Towards the Stars* and *The Wisdom of the Gods*, was later on caught out by Mr Bradley himself in a flagrant piece of imposture. Valiantine had professed to produce an imprint of the thumb of Lord Dewar, then (February, 1933) recently deceased. In the course of a dark seance the imprint was made, sure enough, upon the smoked paper prepared for the purpose, but it proved

to be an impression, not of Lord Dewar's thumb, but of Valiantine's big toe. The identity was established with certainty by finger-print experts, whose credit cannot be disputed. *

[* The evidence, with photographs, is given in full by Mr Bradley in his book '*-and After*' (1931). See also *The Month*, November 1931, pp. 435-7.]

In 1978 the President of the Spiritualist National Union, Gordon Higginson, was put on trial for fraud before a private court (two solicitors and an official from another Spiritualist society). At Bristol in February 1976 in his clairvoyance he gave out names and addresses and invited a response from his audience. The accusation was that names were available from library lists, a healing book and other material in the church, and that Higginson had been left alone in the church for an hour before the performance. The court was not satisfied that all the names were available in the documents and held that there was no direct evidence to contradict the defence account of what happened. Higginson was then acquitted. This development whereby a private tribunal was set up may lead to higher professional standards among Spiritualists.

In the matter of psychic photography which has occasioned so much controversy, and which, for over 70 years, has been brought forward again and again as supplying tangible proof of an agency which could not be of this world, there has been a hardly less surprising exposure and retraction. Of all the mediums for photographic 'extras', the most famous in recent times was the late Mr W. Hope, of Crewe. Dozens of books appeal to the negatives of spirit faces obtained in his presence as completely decisive and in particular, Conan Doyle, in his *Case for Spirit Photography*, stakes everything on Hope's results. Many expert photographers vouched for their genuineness and, in particular, Mr Fred Barlow, the Secretary of the 'Society for the Study of Supernormal Pictures', contributed both a preface and an important chapter to Doyle's volume. This was in 1922. Some years later, however, Mr Barlow, who as a practical expert always retained a keen interest in the problem, was led, owing to the discoveries made and the confession of fraud obtained in the case of another psychic photographer, to conceive suspicions regarding Hope himself. After following up the clue and applying in conjunction with Major Rampling Rose, certain rigorous tests, he came to the conclusion that his earlier belief in the integrity of the Crewe circle had been unwarranted. In a paper contributed to the *Proceedings* of the Society for Psychical Research the whole case against Hope is set out in detail. It is conclusive, but based on too many converging lines of proof to be summarized here. It would seem that most of the 'extras' must have been obtained by a tiny picture attached to a small flash light which Hope kept in his pocket, or secreted in the hollow of his hand. [See *Proceedings* of the S.P.R., vol. xli (1933), pp. 121-138, and cf. *The Month*, June 1933, pp. 532-536. The 'spirit photography' stunt continues.]

Altogether it is impossible to doubt that an enormous amount of trickery and fraud has been mixed up with Spiritualism from the very beginning. [The 'debunking' by Trevor Hall of the Florence Cook materializations on the ground that at the relevant time she was the mistress of Sir William Crookes has angered Spiritualists. The evidence is not quite decisive,]

Even Doyle, in the volume of essays published a week or two before his death, owns that, in America particularly, things were worse than he had previously thought possible. Though nothing but ignorance, he remarks, can suppose that there are no real mediums, 'at the same time the States, and in a lesser degree our own people, do need stern supervision.' 'I admit,' he adds, 'that I underrated the corruption in the States. [Doyle, *The Edge of the Unknown*, p. 7.]

It is then, perhaps, not unnatural that many intelligent people, whose normal attitude to the marvellous is one of healthy scepticism, should, from the universal prevalence of trickery, be led to infer that nothing is genuine in the phenomena of Spiritualism. This view has found acceptance among many earnest Catholics, both clergy and laity, especially in the United States. To the present writer the objections to this 'nothing but trickery' hypothesis seem even more serious than those which beset what Mr J. Arthur Hill has called 'the wholesale devil theory', espoused by the late Mr Godfrey Raupert, Father Blackmore, and the majority of Continental ecclesiastics. The limits of this essay unfortunately preclude a fuller discussion

of a question which turns entirely on evidence and cannot be briefly stated [See (Thurston) chapters viii to xii of *The Church and Spiritualism*.]

It must suffice here to quote a passage from the excellent little tractate of Pere Mainage, O.P., entitled *La Religion Spirite*. Those who, like this experienced Dominican Father, have come into close contact with such psychical happenings are apt to form an impression of the subject very different from that of the normal professor of theology. Anyway, Pere Mainage writes:

"Is it possible without falling into an absurd extreme of hypercriticism to refuse credence to the confidences made by word of mouth of people whose mental balance, good faith, and high level of intelligence are beyond all question? To myself, as priest and religious, it has happened -if I may for once be pardoned the introduction of my own modest testimony - to come into contact with such witnesses; and I admit, very simply and without waiting for the final word of science, I admit that I believe in the objectivity of spiritualistic phenomena. There are tables which turn and which talk. Mediumistic script is not the figment of a crazy imagination. Apparitions are not all of them the result of unreal hallucinations, and the partial materialization obtained by Dr Geeley are not a pure chimera." [*La Religion Spirite*, p. 87.]

It is often taken for granted that a medium who has once been detected in imposture may be assumed to produce all his phenomena fraudulently. This is an extreme view which seems to be contradicted by evidence that cannot be lightly dismissed. The well-known Eusapia Palladino is said to have habitually taken advantage of any carelessness on the part of those who controlled her limbs in order with a free hand or foot to play any childish trick which would cause a sensation in the dim light of the seance room. Nevertheless the testimony of dozens of experienced investigators, the flash-light photographs revealing levitated objects in contact with no human support, and above all the detailed report of the Naples sittings with Messrs Fielding, Carrington, and Baggally demonstrated 'that Eusapia undoubtedly did an occasion exhibit extraordinary powers. It is even possible that the medium who tricks is not always consciously fraudulent. He, or she, is often entranced, and in that hypnotic condition may be peculiarly susceptible to the suggestion latent in the minds of the sitters that some particular deception is about to be attempted. Their minds are intent on this thought, and the battery of suggestion becomes so strong that the medium, in spite of herself, does the very thing which they have mentally pictured her doing.

Again, we know nothing about the nature or dispositions of the 'spirits' who are supposed to be the agents of these phenomena. Certain records would even suggest that they may deliberately prompt some fraudulent device which results in the undoing of the medium. There is nothing to forbid our thinking that among them are evil spirits animated by a malicious purpose, though, on the other hand, some of the communicating intelligences appear truthful and kindly. A suggestion has been made that they may be souls of the unbaptized, who died in infancy or without any sufficient knowledge of God, and whom Catholics believe to enjoy some sort of natural beatitude in 'Limbo'.

The first medium who went into a trance before the TV cameras (Ursula Roberts, for Tyne-Tees in 1960) had offered to produce three physical effects, to light up a neon tube with spirit-electricity, to start a metronome ticking and to register a change of radiation on a Geiger counter. All three experiments failed. She spoke in trance for an Indian spirit-guide, but in doing so she fell into Malapropisms of speech of the same character as she had shown when speaking communications some years before which purported to come from Mrs Eddy. Her two professional defenders on the panel which discussed her TV performance were unable to account for this save on the hypothesis that her own subconscious was coming through.

But the fact is that we know nothing about the agencies who purport to communicate. The subconsciousness of the medium is no doubt responsible for by far the larger part of the messages received, but there is a residue which it is very hard to account for except as coming from some intelligence which is external to the world in which we live.

V. A FEW CONCLUSIONS

If Spiritualism has the merit of upholding the belief that man is not purely material, and that a future life awaits him the conditions of which are in a measure dependent upon his conduct here upon earth, it must be confessed that there is very little else to set to its credit. Catholic teaching recognizes one divine revelation which it is the appointed office of the Church, in dependence upon the living voice of the Supreme Pontiff, to maintain inviolate. For this Spiritualism substitutes as many revelations as there are mediums, or rather controls, all these communications being open to suspicion and, as the briefest examination shows, abounding in contradictions about matter most vital. Largely as a consequence of the disagreements in the guidance thus received, hardly any two Spiritualists hold the same views, and, from its earliest beginnings down to the present time, the movement has entirely lacked cohesion. [In *Psychic News* for November 2nd, 1946, a correspondent wonders how unity can be achieved in view of the divergent conceptions of our Lord entertained by Spiritualists.]

Such energizing force as it possesses seems to be due, partly to that curiosity about the occult which leads people to consult palmists and to purchase Old Moore's Almanack, partly to a pathetic desire of the bereaved to obtain tidings of those who are dear to them, the tragedies of the War having clearly exercised a great stimulus in promoting the vogue of this form of relief.

Unfortunately the comfort which Spiritualism offers in such cases is entirely dependent upon one indispensable condition, viz., the possibility of identification. But those who believe that they have got into contact with their dear ones, that they have received messages from them, or have even heard their voices and recognized their features, are building on very insecure foundations. It is admitted that personation is constantly attempted. We know little of the agencies which purport to communicate, but we do know that for some freakish purpose or other they constantly pretend to be what they are not. It is also a generally received tenet among Spiritualists that the departed are free to return to earth, to witness, though invisible themselves, anything which is being done even in the utmost secrecy. There is, on this supposition, no trivial incident in our past lives which may not be known and published abroad in that spirit world of which Conan Doyle and the automatists profess to tell us so much. It is impossible, therefore, for any spirit to give any convincing proof of his identity. Incidents which on earth were known to him alone may be public property on the other side.

The tones of the voice or tricks of expression which are reproduced in a 'direct-voice' sitting cannot proceed from the larynx which has long since crumbled to dust. However effected, the voice is a counterfeit, and who will say that it is only the spirit of the departed which can build up the vocal chords so as to yield a perfect imitation? Similarly when Conan Doyle assures us that at a seance he has seen his son as clearly as he ever saw him in life, we may be sure that the features he beheld were not the features as they then lay buried beneath the soil. So here again we are led to ask how the *simulacrum* which he recognized afforded any proof that the poor lad who had perished stood there himself beside him.

In recent years Spiritualism has been very much allied with faith-healing. Three-quarters of the Spiritualist centres in London offer healing services weekly. In July, 1966 a 'psychic surgeon' from Brazil gave a demonstration in London. According to *Psychic News*, 'one patient showed no improvement; the second died within the time-limit given him by a hospital.' One Spiritualist advertises 'a free healing service for young Mongol babies,' others offer 'absent healing for animals (send the name of your pet).' Dissension broke out in December, 1966 in the National Federation of Spiritual Healers.

Finally the whole atmosphere of the seance room is repellent, and even the process of automatic writing, with its frequent inanities and platitudes and obvious fictions, characterizes such communications as mainly the product of subconscious, and often morbid, auto-suggestion.

'There is very little that is spiritual in Spiritualism,' wrote Friedrich von Hugel, and as G. K. Chesterton

happily remarks, 'you do not expect to hear the voice of God calling from a coal cellar.' Mr Findlay, Mr Oaten, and their followers who have made short work of the Trinity, do at the same time profess to hold that 'the Universe is governed by Mind, commonly called God.' [Findlay, *The Rock of Truth*, p. 185.]

What sort of 'Mind' is it, one wonders, which has planned that a handful of men, sitting for hours in the dark, playing gramophone records or making discordant attempts at song in order to 'stimulate vibrations', shall be privileged to evoke those momentous communications from the etheric world which will uplift the whole human race to a moral eminence never attained before. *

[* Lord Hailsham relates in his Autobiography that he attended some Spiritualist services as a young man. "Neither the information vouchsafed through the medium nor the gradual steps by which the information became available seemed to me to be convincing. If it had a supernatural source . . . , the triviality of the information supplied was such that I could only assume that the loved ones concerned were either unusually stupid in their lives or had undergone a serious degeneration after they had crossed over."]

Spiritualism, so far, has certainly not been associated with progress. No new fact has come to light through this source which has added to the world's knowledge or has led it to seek higher ideals. Its history reminds us, on the contrary, of what St Paul wrote to Timothy: 'But the Spirit plainly says that in after times some will fall away from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and the teachings of demons, through the impostures of those who speak falsely, men seared in their own conscience.' [1 Tim 4: 1 and 2 (Westminster Version).]

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With regard to most of the questions touched upon in this essay there is no difference of opinion among Catholic writers. No one disputes that Spiritualism claims to be a source of religious guidance in opposition to the teaching of the Church, nor that it is morally and even physically dangerous to those who give themselves up to it, nor that its mediums are to a very great extent fraudulent, and its revelations full of contradictions. All again are agreed that in these practices there is danger of the intervention of evil spirits, and that no one can ever have certainty as to the identity of the agencies who purport to communicate. There is, however, some divergence of views as to the phenomena of Spiritualism.

Among the writers who incline to the belief that, apart from telepathy or some other such natural faculty, practically all the manifestations are due to conscious trickery, may be named:

C. M. de Heredia, S.J., *Spiritism and Common Sense*, 1922.

J. J. Walsh, M.D., *Spiritualism a Fake*, 1925.

D. J. Gearon, O.C.C., *Spiritism, its Failure*, 1931.

The more noteworthy books which assign the leading part in the practice of Spiritualism to diabolic intervention are:

L. Roure, S.J., Article *Spiritisme* in *Dict. theol. cath.*, xiv, 2507-2522 (1940).

S. A. Blackmore, S.J., *Spiritism, Facts, and Frauds*, 1924.

H. V. O'Neill, *Spiritualism*, 1944.

J. Godfrey Raupert, *Modern Spiritism*, 1904;

The New Black Magic, 1919.

Finally, there are those who, while admitting the existence of an immense amount of trickery, maintain the reality of many surprising mediumistic phenomena without attributing them of necessity to diabolic

agency.

This is the attitude of Pere Th. Mainage, O.P., in his *La Religion Spirite*, 1921,

and also G. de Ninno in *Enciclopedia cattolica* (1953) s.v. Spiritismo.

See further in *The Month*, September and October, 1934, 'Spiritualism To-day', and 'Spiritualism for the Masses'.

This third view is also upheld by Fr Humphrey Johnson in a series of articles in *The Clergy Review* (xxxii, pp. 1, 156, and 299; xxxiii, p. 145) during 1949 and 1950.

Consult also:

H. Thurston, *The Physical Phenomena of Mysticism*, ed. Crehan, 1952.

Trevor C. Hall, *The Spiritualists* (1962) and

New Light on old Ghosts by the same (1965).

Rosalind Heywood, *The Sixth Sense* (1959)

and Renee Haynes, *The Hidden Springs* (1961) deal admirably with extra-sensory perception

J. A. Findlay, *Looking Back* (1955)

and G. D. Cummins, *Unseen Adventures* (1951) add personal matters.

A valuable monograph by Alan .1. A. Eliott on *Chinese Spirit Medium-cults* (1955) was published by the Anthropological Department of the London School of Economics; it shows how the other half of the world is not so different, after all.

B. Inglis, *Natural and Supernatural* (1977) tells the story of the rise of Spiritualism until 1914.

See also Celia Green and Charles McCreery, *Apparitions* (1975).